CINEMA 16 FILM NOTES 1961-1962

Season 15 - Program 1 - October 1961

WELCOME TO CINEMA 16 !

This being our 15th season, it seems reasonable to assume that Cinema 16 fills a specific and continuing need in the cultural life of the city. Cinema 16 is the "Off-Broadway" of the cinema .. the "Little Mag" of the film world. Its only ambition is to search out the creative, the artistic, the experimental; its only goal to be the showcase for new directions in the cinema.

Here are the kind of films you will see at Cinema 16 which your neighborhood theatre does not or cannot show:

1. Legal and censorship regulations prevent theatrical showing of many outstanding films, including restricted Government films, psychological or medical studies, foreign and American feature films, independent and avant-garde work.
2. Boxoffice considerations prevent theatrical showing of many worthwhile films because they are considered too controversial, too high-brow, too educational or too experimental.
3. Practically none of the theatres show 16mm films, thereby excluding the vast majority of contemporary documentary, psychological, art, scientific, avant-garde and independent film work produced in this country and abroad.
4. In theatres, the short is treated as an appendage to the feature. It is almost never advertised and you never know where a good short may be playing.

At Cinema 16, however:

1. Censorship or boxoffice considerations do not apply, since we operate as a private, non-profit membership society of adults.
2. The short is the guest of honor, since we have found at least as much "film art" in shorts as we have in features.
3. 16mm films are shown as well as 35mm films.
4. A continuing opportunity is offered you to compare the best films of yesterday with the favorites of today and the promising film makers of tomorrow.

At Cinema 16, we believe in the active rather than the passive spectator. We address ourselves to adults, not to a vast undifferentiated audience. We welcome controversy instead of avoiding it. We cater to the intellectually curious who want stimulation, not to the mentally tired who require routinized entertainment.

This is why there is a need for a Cinema 16 .. for an independent, and non-commercial showcase. This is why we exist; and this is also why, we fondly believe, you have given us your support over the years and will continue to do so for many more to come.

Amos Vogel

LINES HORIZONTAL Canada, 1960 6 minutes

National Film Board of Canada Production by Norman McLaren and Evelyn Lambart. Music: Pete Seeger. Sound effects: Joseph Champagne.

Venice and Edinburgh Awards 1960

The first Cinemascope film by one of the world's leading animators is an experiment in pure design composed entirely of straight lines ruled directly on plain black film. The colored backgrounds were made by passing this black-and-white version through an optical printer and exposing the film through color filters onto color negative stock. Seeger's score is improvised; nine musical instruments, including flutes, banjos, drums, maraccas and mandolins, were separately recorded and then "mixed" on tape.

THE SUN'S BURIAL Japan, 1960 87 minutes

A Shochiku Production, directed by Nagisa Ohshima. Script: Ohshima and Toshiro Ishido. Photography: Ko Kawamata. Music: Riichiro Manabe. Cast: Hanako..Kayoko Honoo; Takeshi..Isao Sasaki; Shin.. Masahiko Tsugawa; Hanako's father.. Junzaburo Ban; Batasuke.. Kamatari Fujiwara; His wife .. Tanie Kitabayashi; The agitator .. Eitaro Ozawa.

Twenty-nine year-old Nagisa Oshima is something of a phenomenon in Japanese cinema. For one thing, he has come into national prominence at an age when most Japanese assistants have at least another decade to go before making their first film. For another, he comes from nowhere, in an industry which habitually so carefully plans for the future that one knows today who the best directors will be ten years from now.

After graduating from Kyoto University in 1954, Oshima entered the Kyoto branch of the Shochiku Motion Picture Company, and became an assistant to both Hotaro Nomur and Hideo Oba, two minor directors who have been turning out simple entertainment films for years. For Nomura he wrote two scripts, FORGET ME NOT (Tsukimiso) and LET'S GO (Donto u Koze) and in 1958 was allowed to direct a ten-minute short, TOMORROW'S SUN (Asu no Taiyo), which introduced new Shochiku stars.

In 1959 Oshima was allowed to make his first film, A TOWN FULL OF HOPE (Ai to Kibo no Machi), one which was never adequately distributed in Japan, or elsewhere, but which the critics liked, remarking upon his "surprising originality." Just as surprising was the fact that a motion picture company with a somewhat reactionary reputation should allow an absolutely unknown and untried youngster to make a full-length film.

The reason was that several years ago Japanese films, for the first time in history, stopped making money. Neither widescreen, color, monster pictures, nor Buddhist epics recaptured the lost audience. About that time the pictures of Chabrol, Camus, Truffaut, and Godard first came to Japan. Everyone was talking about the "New Wave" and Shochiku decided to manufacture its own. What the term meant, judging from films released under its banner, was simply more sex and more sadism. Now that

the wave has passed it is apparent that only the films of Oshima have any intrinsic merit, if only because he was not contented with sex and sadism alone.

For Shochiku he made the excellent NAKED YOUTH (Seishun Zankoku Monogatari) in 1960, and followed it with THE TOMB OF THE SUN (Taiyo no Hakaba), (in the U. S. called "The Sun's Burial"). His last Shochiku picture was NIGHT AND FOG IN JAPAN (Nihon no Yoru to Kiri), the title of which is a slight bow to Alain Resnais Leaving Shochiku, after an argument concerning a script he had written for Fujiko Yamamoto, reigning movie queen of Japan, he joined a small independent company and is at present making SHIIKU, an almost untranslatable title, since it is a verb used when buying animals. The film stars an American Negro and is based upon a story by the latest of the young literary sensations, Kenzaburo Oe.

Suprising as it is that Shochiku should have allowed a young unknown to make films (a venture which paid off; all the films except the last did very well in Japan), it is equally surprising that, coming from the completely uninspiring company of Nomura and Oba, the films should be so original and, a quality rare in Japanese cinema, so personal.

As is true with many young directors, Oshima's pictures define him. They are all concerned with the problems of youth in Japan, specifically those which involve crime and hence dramatize the revolt against the traditional. Politically they are rather left. Society is to blame; the agitator of THE TOMB OF THE SUN is quite anti-Soviet and turns out to be a villain of the deepest dye; the whole of NIGHT AND FOG IN JAPAN, an extremely unsuccessful film, is concerned with the Zengakuren, that student organization which caused Mr. Eisenhower such concern and in which Oshima himself was an active member in his Kyoto University days. More important, however, is that stylistically all three reflect the earnest young intellectual who refuses to see his world as his father saw it, who purposely looks for a new perspective on reality, and who will try anything provided that it has not been tried before.

THE TOMB OF THE SUN is full of such experiments and most of them come off. Oshima is, at his age, scarcely a finished director; rather, he has brought a visual vitality to the Japanese cinema which it has not seen since the end of the war and the first films of Kinoshita and Kurosawa. And though one may think of Bunuel (the dog-torturing scene, the scene where one boy flays another with animal innards, the scene where the boy's body is dumped into the canal - so much like the final scene of LOS OLVIDADOS) and Kurosawa (the entire film owes much to that director's neglected masterpiece, the 1957 THE LOWER DEPTHS (Donzoku), still, the world which Oshima creates - the back-alleys of Kamagasaki in Osaka - is a very real one, and one heightened by insistence upon the theatrical, the grand-guignol, the shocking detail. Perhaps Oshima's single greatest triumph is that this world is not only believable but also palpably Japanese, particularly when the details are most shocking.

The dead of the young hoodlum Yasu (played by Yusuke Kawazu), where the camera lingers in the most openly erotic manner over his twitching torso, the close-ups of Shin's bleeding feet, the fantastic party scene in which a beer bottle (though discretely hidden in the background) plays an unusually phallic role, the bar scene where important action is not shown and, instead, the camera looks at the heroine, the fight scene which is shot from so far away that the characters lose all emotional

reference, the final close-up of the heroine looking straight into the camera and allowing herself a twitching half-smile: all of these spring from the same impulse, completely Japanese, which in other days controlled the haiku, the tanka, the sumi-e - they are stationary representations which sum up and, in the same stroke, reassemble the visible world.

Whether Nagisa Oshima will be able, or will be allowed to make the kind of films he wants to, these three have made manifest that his is one of the brighter promises for the modern Japanese cinema.

Donald Richie

Mr. Richie is co-author of THE JAPANESE FILM (1959) and author of JAPANESE MOVIES (JTB, 1961).

A note on Shochiku

Shochiku - the production company responsible for THE SUN'S BURIAL - may best be compared to a combination of, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, United Artists, Radio City Music Hall, Loew's and City Center. Its enterprises include the production, distribution and exhibition of motion pictures; the production of Japan's famed classical theatre arts, the KABUKI and the BUNRAKU (puppet theatre), the Shochiku Girls Revues and musicals; and various lines of business connected with these enterprises. About 90 motion pictures are produced annually at the Shochiku studios in Ofuna and Kyoto, among them many of the outstanding Japanese films seen in the West. At present, 60 theatres are under Shochiku's direct management and 2,100 under contract representing 30% of Japan's theatres. Shochiku's export activities are not limited to film; the Kabuki Troupe recently seen in America was the Shochiku company. Likewise, a separate Shochiku enterprise imports foreign films into Japan. This year, the company erected a "Shochiku Amusement Zone" in the Ginza area in the heart of Tokyo, encompassing 10 of Japan's largest motion pictures theatres. Subsidiary activities include publications of Kabuki productions, a magazine, restaurants and novelty shops in the Shochiku theatres.

MEMBERSHIP CAN BEGIN WITH ANY PERFORMANCE and continues for a full year thereafter; tell your friends that nothing is lost by joining after the season begins.

DECEMBER PROGRAM: Please remember that due to the length of this program, Sunday screenings will begin at 11 AM, Wednesday screenings at 7 and 9:30 PM.

FILM BOOKS AND MAGAZINES AT SUBSTANTIAL SAVINGS
are available at our literature table in the lobby. Be sure to visit it on your way out.

10% DISCOUNT ON FILM RENTALS IS AVAILABLE TO MEMBERS
on all films distributed by Cinema 16 for home or club showings. These films constitute the most comprehensive library of experimental and independent films in America. They can be run ONLY on 16mm sound projectors. For free catalog, write: Cinema 16, 175 Lexington Avenue, New York 16, N.Y.

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